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Brazil's Nut

The upcoming election bodes well for a Castro wannabe.

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IN OCTOBER 2002, a political event is likely to occur that will be a major setback for freedom. If it happens--and it could still be prevented--it may cause as many as 300 million people in several countries to fall under the control of anti-American dictatorships. It could also increase dramatically the threat of terrorist attacks in the United States.

This avoidable event is the election to the presidency of a country nearly as large as the United States of a radical politician who for 30 years has been a close ally of Fidel Castro. Currently, this radical politician is at 40percent in the polls and rising, while his closest pro-democratic opponent is at about 20 percent. In 1990, this presidential candidate co-founded with Castro the Forum of Sao Paulo, which every year since has convened Communist and other terrorist organizations and radical political movements from Latin America, Europe, and the Middle East. These annual meetings have been used by the participants to coordinate their plans for taking power in their respective countries and for executing actions against the United States.

The country that might be governed by this democratically elected radical has a population of about 180 million. Vast and richly endowed, it has the world's eighth-largest economy (GDP \$1.2 trillion in 2001), with many advanced sectors, including aerospace and military production. From 1965 to at least 1979, this country had an active program to develop nuclear weapons; according to a congressional investigation in that country, the program continued after 1990 even though a democratically elected president had exposed the secret plan of the military to build an atomic bomb and had publicly closed a nuclear test site. That investigation also revealed that elements of the military had secretly exported 8 tons of uranium to Iraq in 1981.

The radical presidential candidate has said his country should have nuclear weapons and should move closer to Communist China, which has actively courted elements of the military and has made investments in the aerospace industry, resulting in, among other things, a jointly operated imagery satellite. It is also reported that a leading air force general from this country led a group of more than 20 missile scientists who went to work for Saddam Hussein after a democratic president canceled their successful ballistic missile program in 1990.

The country that could come under the rule of this pro-Castro radical is Brazil, which, as a democracy for more than 20 years, has been a constructive partner of the United States and other democracies. Brazil borders almost every country in South America. Under a radical president, it would very likely be the focal point for political and military assistance to the Communist narco-guerrillas in Colombia and to anti-democratic groups seeking to overturn potentially fragile democracies in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru--not to mention neighboring Argentina, already in the grip of economic crisis.

The man who may bring all this about is Luis Inacio da Silva, presidential candidate of the Workers' party. Now 56, da Silva has been active in far left labor organizations and politics since the 1970s. He narrowly lost his first presidential bid in 1989, when he received 47 percent of the vote. With this fourth run for the presidency, he seems on the threshold of victory.

For decades, da Silva has blamed democracy, market-oriented institutions, and the United States for all the social and economic problems of his country and of Latin America. The Workers' party has long opposed the involvement of Brazil with international financial institutions and international borrowing and has argued that Brazil should suspend payment on its large foreign debt. Perhaps that is why Morgan Stanley recently lowered Brazil's debt rating. Now, da Silva, as part of the moderate disguise he wears for campaign purposes, says he favors paying on

some of Brazil's international debt, but he's been known to call international lenders seeking repayment "economic terrorists" and to label Bush's Free Trade Area of the Americas "a U.S.A. annexation project."

On many occasions, da Silva has said publicly that he is a friend of Venezuela's president Hugo Chavez, whom he has praised as "an example to emulate" if he were elected president. This would mean, first, the use of pseudo-electoral processes and referenda to consolidate his rule as a dictator; second, the dispatching of aid to radical organizations attacking neighboring governments; and third, expansion of ties including military relationships with Cuba, Iraq, Iran, and Communist China.

Da Silva's Workers' party has controlled one state in Brazil, Rio Grande do Sul, since 2000. There the school textbooks are Marxist-Leninist, institutions are politicized and radical, and the local Workers' party bosses are reportedly financed by illegal gambling syndicates. Da Silva points to Rio Grande do Sul as a "showcase," and indeed it offers a preview of the tragedy awaiting all of Brazil if he and his party win the presidency.

U.S. Treasury secretary Paul O'Neill recently drew attention to the economic risks inherent in Brazil's more than \$250 billion dollar international debt and caused great concern in the financial community when he said that "throwing the U.S. taxpayer's money at a political uncertainty in Brazil doesn't seem brilliant to me. . . . The situation there is driven by politics, . . . not . . . by economic conditions." A da Silva presidency would likely mean Brazil's default on its debts, which, combined with the crisis in Argentina, could cause immense economic problems in all of Latin America. But worse than the economic downturn would be the effect on the Brazilian people of a radical regime moving toward dictatorship and the risk of destabilization in the region from a Castro-da Silva-Chavez axis.

A da Silva regime in Brazil could soon be followed by the success of the Communist guerrillas in Colombia and the establishment of anti-American regimes in Bolivia, Peru, and Ecuador (where in January 2000 radicals toppled the government in a few days, with help from military officers recruited by Chavez, though their success was short-lived). Thus, by the end of 2003, the United States might be faced with anti-American regimes in most of South America.

If those regimes recruited only one tenth of one percent of military-aged males for terrorist attacks on the United States, this could mean 30,000 terrorists coming from the south. In addition, many Middle Eastern terrorist organizations, including the PLO, have long collaborated with Castro against the United States and its allies; they and the Iranian-backed terrorists of Hezbollah have hidden among the sizable Middle Eastern communities in Brazil and Venezuela.

Already Chavez is probably contributing millions, if not tens of millions, of dollars covertly to da Silva out of the estimated \$70 billion in oil revenues that Venezuela has obtained since he became president. It is virtually certain that Castro is committing hundreds, perhaps thousands, of his skilled political and intelligence operatives to help da Silva win, and thereby achieve one of Castro's highest strategic priorities.

What can be done? The United States and other democracies should give immediate and serious attention to Brazil. The democratic parties of Brazil and the democracies of the hemisphere should see to it that an honest, competent, effective, pro-democratic unity candidate has the means to compete in October's election against this radical threat.

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